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vox humana: Interactive Music for Organ and Live

Electronics by women composers

Lauren Redhead (organ) and Alistair Zaldua (electronics)

2020



Project Description



vox humana is a collaborative project between Lauren Redhead, Alistair Zaldua and (to date) five composers who have created music for this programme: Nina Whiteman (UK), Cara Stacey (ZA), Ailís Ní Ríain (IE), Sophie Stone (UK) and Annette Schmucki (CH). Each work offers a unique voice, a unique perspective on the combination of organ and electronics, and innovative approaches to sound, use of electronics, and experimental works. This project has two aims: to amplify the voices of innovative women composers who are underrepresented in the field of organ music, and to collaboratively work towards new approaches to interactivity between the organ and electronics in the concert hall. In terms of the latter aim, each piece offers unique and individual strategies encompassing video, experimental notation, improvisation, and recording and sampling. Collaborative development between the composers and performers has allowed each piece to develop through rehearsals and workshops, and they continue to evolve through their development for different live performance situations and instruments.

Performances

Premiere Performance:

8th February 2020, Ideas of Noise Festival, St Paul's Church, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham

Details: <https://ideasofnoise.com/line-up>

Review: <https://londonjazznews.com/2020/02/17/kit-downes-tom-challenger-lauren-redhead-alistair-zaldua-andrew-woodhead-at-ideas-of-noise-in-birmingham/>

Second Performance:

19th February 2020, Electric Spring Festival, Phipps Hall, University of Huddersfield

Details: <http://electricspring.co.uk/#full-programme>

Selected pieces performed:

14th February 2020, St Stephen's Church Bristol

(pieces by Sophie Stone and Annette Schmucki)

Recordings: <https://automatronic.bandcamp.com/album/bristol-14220-2>

Programme Notes and Biographies

Escape! (2019-20)

Nina Whiteman



Escape! explores notions of lostness (geographical, cartographical, psychological) as performers navigate a video score, responding sonically to graphic symbols. The video comprises a series of quasi-architectural drawings, and within each of these rooms a series of tasks must be completed, often under pressing time constraints (similar to the Escape Room game phenomena, where groups of participants must solve clues to unlock the exit). Interaction between the two performers varies from racing, to following, to coordinating. Furthermore, the organ and electronics have comparable responses to the symbols (e.g. an open doorway indicates an octave change, and a black hole a bass drone). The composition extends my work with ideas originating in maze and labyrinth design initiated in *House of Mazes* (2017) and continued in, for example, *TOMB* (2019, featuring video footage shot in a disused mine).

Escape! was commissioned by Lauren Redhead and Alistair Zaldua with funds from Goldsmiths, University of London. I am extremely grateful to Lauren and Alistair for their generous and creative contributions to the collaborative process.

Described as ‘beguiling’ (*The Guardian*), **Nina Whiteman’s** 2016 composition for the BBC Philharmonic, *The Map of Days Outworn*, was performed at the Bridgewater Hall and commissioned and broadcast by BBC Radio 3. Recent work has drawn inspiration from mazes and labyrinths, placing performers and audience in disorienting spaces and employing maze-like semi-graphic notation (*House of Mazes*, *TOMB*, *Everything near becomes distant*).

Her music has been performed widely in the UK and abroad by ensembles such as Manchester Camerata, Quatuor Danel, Dutch accordion duo TOEAC, Ealing Youth Orchestra, Psappha, Colinton Amateur Orchestra (Adopt-a-composer scheme), and Distractfold Ensemble at venues and festivals including the Cheltenham Music Festival, Kettle’s Yard, Kings Place and the RNCM. International performances include *The Galaxy Rotation Problem* at the World Music Days festival (Slovenia, 2015; selected by British and international panels).

Nina is the singer in Trio Atem as well as founding co-artistic director. Trio Atem have commissioned over 40 compositions since forming in 2007, touring work nationally, as well as

collaborating on multimedia performances. She is also Artistic Director of Manchester Contemporary Youth Opera, an organisation leading the creation of new opera for 18-25 year-olds in the UK. Nina teaches at the RNCM, and is currently Director of Composition at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Aureole (2020)

Cara Stacey



Aureole is a piece that explores cyclical sonic and harmonic textures through the various timbral qualities of the organ and manipulated recorded sound. It draws from southern African Dinaka hocketing techniques but also found sound recordings made on the island Itaparica in Bahia, Brazil, in 2018. In both senses, the treatment and development of these sounds explore the ideas of repetition, the ocean and its cycles, heat and brightness, change and stasis.

Cara Stacey is a South African musician, composer and researcher. She is a pianist and plays southern African musical bows (umrhubhe, uhadi, makhweyane). As a Commonwealth Scholar, she completed her PhD through the University of Cape Town and SOAS (London). Her doctoral research investigated practice and innovation in the music of the makhweyane musical bow in the Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland). Her debut album 'Things that grow' features Shabaka Hutchings, Seb Rochford, Ruth Goller, and Crewdson (2015, Kit Records). Her latest album, 'Ceder', is of her duo project with Peruvian flutist and composer Camilo Ángeles (2018, Kit Records). Cara has performed across southern Africa, in the United Kingdom, Brazil, Peru, the USA and Switzerland with the likes of Shabaka Hutchings, Sarathy Korwar, Dan Leavers, Galina Juritz, Beat Keller, Matchume Zango, Jason Singh and Juliana Venter.

Sour Morning Crimson (2019)

Ailís Ní Ríain

For Lauren and Alistair



The title is taken 'Lives of a Student' a poem by Padraic Fiacca [1924-2019] taken from *Ruined Pages Selected Poems*, 1994. Published by The Blackstaff Press, Northern Ireland. Padraic Fiacca was a poet from Northern Ireland who died in 2019. I am a great admirer of his work and the title of this piece comes from an early poem of his written c.1946. As someone raised in the Catholic faith [as was Fiacca], and now a practising Christian, the idea of a 'sour morning crimson out of a long lent' reverberates strongly with me. It is difficult to capture in words how one wrestles with aspects of the faith we choose to follow. The poem is, for me, a challenging and often abstract allusion to what our faith asks of us, personal struggle and religious doctrine.

The incessant organ part eludes to what has gone before and what continues long after we are gone. For the most part, it is a regular and stoic presence despite the sonic challenges which the electronics present. The organ pedal line refers to a type of 'ground bass' - something deep-seated in an individual's belief and steadfast interpretation of the scriptures. While on the face of it, the somewhat 'jaunty' organ line is really anything but, for it represents something that won't budge, no matter what comes its way, this can be interpreted freely – it is certainly not an admission that faith comes easily or should go unchallenged.

I am very grateful to Lauren and Alistair for inviting me to compose for them – especially for an instrument I have a long and often complicated relationship with. The interrogation of this has been rewarding and refreshing - allowing each of our creative voices space to grow.

'At the Feast of the Martyrdom	Phallic fern burn	I did not know I could
Of the Innocent	Out of strong skull	Not die and be done
I knelt at the blood-red coverlet	Holes for eyes, poppies	With tulip fire in
Of the altar and dreamt	And crocuses sprout	Worm-raining sun
Sour morning crimson	Out of the stale dry	The roses of the flesh at noon
Out of a long Lent.	Dust of empty soul.	Leeched on the whittled bone.'

We are grateful to the Hinrichsen Foundation who provided the funds for the commission of *Sour Morning Crimson*.



Ailís Ní Ríain is an Irish contemporary classical composer & pianist who aims to produce work that challenges, provokes and engages. A regular collaborator with artists in other art-forms, her artistic interests are diverse and combined with an unwavering desire to develop her artistic practice with each new project or commission. Ailís composes in a variety of forms including music-theatre, concert music and site-responsive installation projects. She has been awarded the prestigious UK Paul Hamlyn Award for Composers.

Her music has been performed at London's Purcell Room, The Royal Festival Hall, The National Concert Hall in Dublin, Carnegie Hall in New York, throughout Europe and in the USA as well as featured on BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, RTÉ Lyric FM and RTÉ Television.

Far Infrared (2019)

Sophie Stone

version for organ and electronics



Far infrared is an open instrumentation and duration ensemble piece, which combines Western, space-time and word notation. The score describes the types of sounds that the performer interprets, and these involve overlapping and generally quiet sustained sounds with subtle and slow changes of pitch and timbre, as well as moments of silence.

Sophie Stone is a composer of experimental music and is a PhD student at Canterbury Christ Church University supervised by Dr Lauren Redhead (Goldsmiths, University of London). Her interests include longform music, graphic and extended notation, modes of listening and silence. Sophie's work has been presented across the UK and in Austria, such as at Sound Thought (Glasgow), Wintersound (Canterbury) and Wandelweiser's Composers Meet Composers (Neufelden, Austria).

54 Stops (2019)

Annette Schmucki



54 stops / grésillement (cracking, sizzling) / alphabet des rauschens (noise alphabet)
pull out all stops.

the organ stops, especially their imaginative names, impress me. their somewhat antiquated orchestral thinking. what would happen if i were to decouple the act of pulling (a stop) with the location of where the timbral change would be expected, to derive a unique set of registration rules, and thereby allowing them to run riot?

i have alphabetically ordered 54 register names. this list of names and those of the names heard in the correspondence (or email exchange that provides the context for this piece) directly determine both the timepoints and sound of this piece. the accented vowels of the register names, their specific sound and the character of their sound-production, trigger the changes of register for the organist, whereby the organist and the live electronics performer are both independent and yet follow intertwined paths.

what this sets in motion are irregular and seemingly random timbral modulations that - even - intervene and determines the choice of the played organ pitches; a running wild, a sheer inversion of the relationships. therefore. pull out all stops.

(trans. Alistair Zaldua)

We are grateful to the Foundation Pro Helvetia who provided the funds for the commission of 54 stops.

*born in 1968 in zürich, **Annette Schmucki** studied composition with cornelius schwehr (winterthur, switzerland), after which she completed her masters in composition with mathias spahlinger (freiburg, germany).

her work engages with speech/language as music.

her artistic work has been awarded many prizes and accolades.

schmucki's work has been commissioned and performed by established ensembles and at festivals such as festival archipel, ensemble ascolta, music festival bern, collegium novum zürich, ensemble contrechamps, ensemble lemniscate, lucerne festival, luzerne theatre, maulwerker berlin, ensemble proton, ensemble recherche, festival neue musik rümlingen, staatsoper berlin, tage für neue musik zürich, festival usine sonore, neue vokalsolisten stuttgart, west german radio (wdr), wien modern, and the wittener tage für neue kammermusik.

in addition to her work as a composer, she has been a member of the artistic duo 'blablabor' since 2000. she has also been involved in the sampler combo 'band' with petra ronner since 2010, and invents the life of the 'sieben schweinschwestern' (seven sister pigs) with the visual artist maria gasche.

1999: werkjahr prize awarded by zürich city.

2000: bürgi willert foundation cultural prize

2001: nominated for her work by zürich canton

2004: werkjahr prize awarded by kuratorium aargau

2010: premiere of the documentary film *hagel und haut* (hailstones and skin), on schmucki's work as a composer

2012/13: stipend awarded by the villa concordia

2015: swiss music prize

2016: landis+gyr residency grant in london

2018 landis+gyr grant for composition projects

annette schmucki is a member of the akademie der künste, berlin. she lives with her two sons in jura bernois, switzerland.



about the performers:



Lauren Redhead and **Alistair Zaldua** have worked together as a duo since 2012, performing music for organ and electronics, with a further focus

on contemporary experimental music, graphic and extended notation for the organ, and live and interactive electronic interfaces. Their performances span the possibilities of the combination from organ with stereo fixed media sound, to organ with live diffusion, organ with live electronics and performances incorporating live notation and improvisation. This has included collaborations with many composers taking innovative approaches to technology, and with visual artists and poets and many invitations to present new perspectives on the organ at festivals and conferences. In 2014 they performed a tour of the UK, supported by the leading UK charity for New Music, Sound and Music, and since then they have performed widely throughout the UK and Europe. In 2015 they released *diapason*, an album of new music for organ and electronics, on the sfzmusic label. In 2018 they collaborated in the studio with Joshua Cannon to produce *hearmleop-gieddunga*, an album of 5 works with Anglo-Saxon titles by Lauren Redhead that they have performed multiple times since 2016. Most recently, the duo presented Ecuadorian composer Mesias Maiguashca's landmark work for organ and electronics *Nemos Orgel* at the Tectonics x Only Connect Festival in Stavanger, in collaboration with Ny Musikk Norway.